

Notes and Implications: “*Como agua para chocolate: A Cinderella Story*”

Analytical Sample

- Literary Analysis
- Higher performance level
- Uses comparison/contrast as a method of analytical idea development

Notes: This higher performing literary analysis illustrates the writer’s drawing conclusions and supporting conclusions about and observation he/she has made about the novel. The piece shows ownership and authenticity as the writer has raised an interpretive question about the novel and shows his/her critical thinking about it. Text is not used directly for support, but rather, the student makes inferences (illustrating analytical thinking) to support major points.

Instructional Implications: This is a good example of the analysis of a piece of literature. The writer’s clear thesis and focus is maintained throughout the piece. Teachers could use this piece with students to identify the student’s use of structure (comparison/ contrast) and inferences.

It might also be interesting for students to critique the piece to determine where direct quotations might offer better support than indirect observations.

Como agua para chocolate: A Cinderella Story

Reading Laura Esquivel's novel *Como agua para chocolate* (the original Spanish version of *Like Water for Chocolate*), I couldn't help noticing some parallels between it and a specific fairy tale. Certain character relationships and magic realism bring to mind the story of Cinderella. However, a more interpretive view of good and evil as well as some sexual content discourage any misconceptions that Esquivel's creation might be a children's story.

Like Cinderella, Tita, the beautiful heroine of *Como agua para chocolate*, is forced to act as a servant to her tyrannical mother and her two sisters. Though Mama Elena is Tita's natural mother, she is the same kind of selfish, domineering woman as Cinderella's stepmother, and, as in the fairy tale, she uses her parental power to deprive her youngest daughter of every possible pleasure, including that of marrying Pedro, the man she loves. Tita's oldest sister, Rosaura, might be compared to one of the evil stepsisters. She comes up with no devious plans to ruin her sister's happiness herself, but she willingly participates in Mama Elena's conniving by agreeing to marry Pedro.

Unlike Cinderella however, Tita does have one sister in whom she can seek condolence. Gertrudis does little to improve Tita's situation, but by offering comfort and compassion, she does give Tita a bit more strength to endure.

Tita has a godmother figure to help her as well. Nacha, the elderly cook on the family ranch, practically raises Tita. Nacha does not supply Tita with the material vehicles through which she can obtain her love, but she does teach her how to cook, a practice Tita turns into art. Born upon the kitchen table amidst the smell of chopped onions, Tita's connection to cooking begins at birth, which is perhaps the reason it is more than even an art to her; it is magic. Through her cooking, Tita can vent her suppressed emotions and even communicate her love to Pedro. In fact, Tita pours so much feeling into the preparation of food that those eating her dishes often experience the same emotion she experiences while cooking them. One section of the novel describes how Tita unintentionally inflicts sorrow and temporary illness upon all the guests at Pedro and Rosaura's wedding simply by crying into the wedding cake batter. In another part, Tita is able, through her cooking alone, to sensuously invade the body of Pedro. Nacha gives Tita neither a magic carriage nor fancy shoes, but by helping refine Tita's culinary skills, she does give her a secret voice that allows her to communicate covertly with Pedro in the very presence of Mama Elena!

Student made an observation/ connection

Focus with an analytical thesis

makes comparison through inference.

transition shows contrast

analysis through comparison

When circumstances toward the end of the novel finally permit the physical union of Tita and Pedro, Nacha's spirit illuminates their bedroom with the romantic glow of hundreds of candles. In her own way, Nacha does work a bit of magic.

As often seen in fairy tales, the sentiments and personalities of the characters in Como agua para chocolate are manifested through their physical qualities. While the big feet and ugly faces of Cinderella's stepsisters reflect their enlarged egos and nasty dispositions, Rosaura's ill will materializes as flatulence, bad breath, and an expanding waistline. It is interesting to note that Rosaura eventually dies of acute indigestion. Fairy tale characters are often either punished or rewarded according to the righteousness of their actions, so Rosaura's dislike for Tita causes her body to protest violently against Tita's cooking and cause her death.

connects characteristics of novel to fairy tales

shows insight - observations and connections

Gertrudis too is affected by Tita's cooking, but because she has a warm heart full of affection for her little sister, she reacts more positively. After eating a delectable dish of pheasants and rose petals, Gertrudis breaks into a pink sweat and streaks from the ranch with burning sexual desire to encounter her future husband, who, detecting her rosy scent from miles away, leaves his position in battle to retrieve his love.

In light of this sexual content, one could compare Esquivel's story to some of the earlier versions of fairy tales which, written initially for adults, contained a fair amount of both sex and violence. However, such content would hardly be welcome in the evolved versions of fairy tales today. More complicated moral issues also make the book more suitable for mature audiences. While traditional fairy tales usually portray the antagonist as completely and even innately evil and the protagonist as a flawless martyr, Como agua para chocolate gives us more freedom to decide for ourselves just how right or wrong each character is. An empathetic reader would sympathize with Mama Elena for her unhappy marriage and the upbringing that taught her to think only of herself. And Tita, who sleeps with her own sister's husband, can hardly be commended as a saint! By providing information that gives a more human roundness to the characters, Esquivel allows us to see them in not such elementary terms as "good" and "bad," but more as real human beings, struggling against difficult circumstances to do what, in their judgment, is right. Like all people though, they sometimes err. ← "So what?"

Comparison

contrast

student makes inference about text

Draws conclusions through analysis

Laura Esquivel has taken a love story, sprinkled it with a little fairy tale charm, whipped in some sentiment-stirring human flaws, and produced a novel that is beautiful, magical, and in an unusual sort of way, very real.

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